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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN FUEL CONVOYS IN SOUTHERN IRAQ: THE
VIEW FROM KUWAIT

REF: A. KUWAIT 5630

[1](#)B. KUWAIT 5539

Classified By: CDA Frank Urbancic for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. A survey of the provision of gasoline and kerosene to southern Iraq under the humanitarian fuel program showed bottlenecks inside Iraq that are slowing truck convoys coming from Kuwait. The downloading depots at Diwaniyah and Latifiyah lack adequate pumps to download fuel from trucks, and Latifiyah is hindered by an intermittent electricity supply. Convoy movements are also slowed by shortages of escorts, and delays as convoys are handed off from one escort unit to another. Several officers pointed to inadequate coordination and communication between the Ministry of Oil, Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR)/Task Force Restore Iraqi Oil (RIO), Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the multinational force, and US Army units. On a related issue, Iraqi Ministry of Oil officials said at a December 28 meeting that they are negotiating with Iran for the importation of kerosene. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) In coordination with CPA, Kuwait econoff traveled overland through southern Iraq December 18 - 20 to canvass procedures for moving and downloading truck convoys providing humanitarian fuel to meet shortages in Iraq. These convoys originate in Kuwait (Reftels) and carry gasoline and kerosene to various downloading depots south of Baghdad. Escorts are provided by US and multinational forces, beginning and ending at the Navistar staging area just south of the Kuwait - Iraq border.

MPs Stretched Thin

Cedar

[1](#)3. (C) Cedar is a logistical base located near the town of Nasiriyah. We spoke with US Army traffic control officers, who confirmed that movement of military and civilian fuel is the top priority of their units. Cedar is a point where military police (MP) units hand-off convoys; generally speaking, Cedar - based MPs handle convoys to-from Navistar, while Scania-based MPs (see below) handle the Cedar - Scania run. Due to a shortage of MPs, this situation sometimes results in convoys having to hold for hours or to overnight at Cedar, despite having driven only a few hours north from Navistar. These circumstances are currently aggravated by limited daylight in the winter months, as the convoys do not move at night; northbound convoys are departing only between 0500 and 1400. (Note- In comparison, TF-RIO officials told us the humanitarian fuel convoys crossing the Turkey - Iraq border are generally escorted by the Army only as far as "Foxtrot", a staging area near Mosul roughly three hours from the border. These convoys sometimes number in the hundreds of trucks. From there, unescorted convoys and individual trucks are dispatched to depots and gas stations throughout northern Iraq. End Note.)

Scania

[1](#)4. (C) We spoke with US Army officers at the Scania base, roughly 25 miles northeast of Diwaniyah. Convoys overnight and refuel at this base, and are escorted onward to depots or south to Cedar. Officers who are involved daily with the humanitarian fuel program said the long turn-around time for convoys is largely due to the limited capacity of the downloading points. This situation is made more difficult by the lack of MPs (MPs at Scania were tasked to escort 669 vehicles on December 19, a typical day).

[1](#)5. (C) They told us the Latifiyah depot is generally open only from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and runs particularly slowly on Thursdays and Fridays (the local "weekend"). They said the speed of downloading is variable, depending on the number of pumps running - on December 17, only one downloading point was operational. As at Cedar, convoys are hindered by short winter days - convoys will not move north later than 1400. Spanish units are responsible for the escort of convoys from Scania to Diwaniyah. On December 19, 75 full

trucks had already waited two days at Scania for Spanish escort; officers told us this was not unusual.

16. (C) The Army officers suggested using other downloading points to reduce waiting times, mentioning An Najaf in particular. They also suggested approaching the Spaniards to provide escorts for convoys directly from Cedar to Diwaniyah (roughly a four-hour trip), which could make a 1-day Navistar to Diwaniyah run possible. The MPs said the assignment of a civil affairs officer for liaison between them and the Ministry of Oil and KBR/RIO would increase the efficiency of their operations.

Depots Struggle to Handle Convoys

Latifiyah:

17. (C) The majority of fuel from Kuwait is downloaded at one of two depots: Latifiyah or Diwaniyah. The depot at Latifiyah provides fuel to the Baghdad area, and is located roughly 15 miles south of Baghdad International Airport and two hours north of Scania. Mr. Hussein Thabt, acting manager of Latifiyah when we visited, told us an undependable electricity supply is his biggest problem. Although the plant has its own backup generator for when grid power goes down, the number of pumps downloading fuel is subsequently reduced. Pump maintenance is also a problem. On December 19 the fuel depot had 94 trucks of gasoline and 46 trucks of kerosene waiting to download (most carrying 32,000 liters). These trucks had left Kuwait on December 14 and 15. Drivers told us they sometimes wait four days to download at Latifiyah.

18. (C) Thabt told us the depot has a total of 6 pumps for gasoline and 2 pumps for kerosene, but these can run simultaneously only if grid power is available (the morning of December 19, only 3 gasoline pumps and 1 kerosene pump appeared to be running). In general, it takes one hour to download a truck. Thabt said the maximum the depot could handle is roughly 100 trucks/day. On December 18, during what Thabt described as a typical day with full electricity, 44 trucks carrying 1,300,000 liters of gasoline and 27 trucks carrying 788,000 liters of kerosene were downloaded.

19. (C) The shortage of escorts also creates a backlog of empty convoys. On December 19, four convoys totaling 92 trucks were on the grounds, waiting to be escorted back to Scania (and then south to Kuwait). These trucks had departed Kuwait on December 12, 13 and 14; drivers told us they had been waiting between one and three days to depart.

110. (C) Given their flammable cargo, holding large numbers of trucks in close proximity to each other presents an inviting target for attack. Thabt told us the truck holding area was attacked with RPGs and mortars 3 weeks prior to our visit, but without significant damage.

Diwaniyah:

111. (C) The download depot at Diwaniyah provides fuel for the surrounding provinces. The acting manager there on Dec. 19 told us the biggest problems are under-capacity pumps that break down often and require constant maintenance. A KBR representative agreed, adding that the lack of parking space for trucks hinders operations. He expressed concern over weak security around the depot. The manager said this facility has 4 download points for benzene and 5 for kerosene, allowing for the downloading of 9 trucks/hour. Unlike the depot at Latifiyah, this compound has a generator capable of providing sufficient electricity when the grid power is down.

112. (C) During our December 19 visit, the kerosene convoy being downloaded had departed Navistar the morning of December 16. Drivers told us on some trips they must wait up to three days to download their cargo at Diwaniyah. Also on the grounds were two empty convoys waiting on Spanish troops to provide escorts to Scania, roughly 25 miles away. These convoys had departed Kuwait on December 15, and their drivers told us they had already waited two days for escorts to arrive. The drivers told us convoys downloading at Diwaniyah generally return to Scania and remain overnight, or fill their tanks and move south to Cedar. They said if convoys could refuel at the Diwaniyah depot, then head directly south, they could avoid a 50-mile detour through Scania.

113. (C) As at Latifiyah, trucks are parked close together, presenting an exposed target. Although we were told a new parking lot is under construction, parking space remains very limited -- on the afternoon of December 20, two convoys waiting to download were staged on the highway outside of the depot, with another convoy ten miles to the south. In a snapshot of the distribution difficulties to be overcome, the gas station directly in front of the depot had more than one

hundred cars in line waiting to get gasoline, while across the highway gasoline was being sold out of 55-gallon drums and jerry cans. These lines and the bootleg vendors were evident in many places, particularly on the road between Hilla and Samawah.

Multinational Force Involvement

14. (C) We spoke December 20 with civil affairs officers at the Multinational Forces HQ in Hilla. These officers are responsible for, among other things, the humanitarian fuel program in the five surrounding provinces, including the towns of Hilla, An Najaf, Karbala and Al Kut. Multinational forces are also escorting fuel convoys every other day from a refinery in Basra. A round-trip, they say, takes from 3 to 4 days.

15. (C) The officers said a better overall view of the distribution plan for civilian fuel would help them in achieving their mission. They also noted the need for more coordination among coalition forces, to include the CPA. One specific recommendation was to assign an officer to CPA regional headquarters in Hilla to help coordinate the fuel program. The officers also noted that the distribution of fuel from depots to retail stations (generally handled by the Ministry of Oil) lacks overall planning, and suffers from a lack of communication between district offices. They said, however, that the Poles are pressing Iraqi officials to better coordinate fuel distribution. This effort is made more administratively difficult since existing Iraqi fuel distribution districts do not correspond to coalition military districts geographically.

16. (SBU) The civil affairs officers believe the depot at Al Kut could download one convoy a day of either kerosene or benzene, and said that Karbala and An Najaf also have depots capable of downloading trucks. They suggested that Hilla-based soldiers should pick up convoys in Scania and move them out to these depots. They noted Hilla has a facility to download diesel and kerosene from railroad tankers, but so far has received only one delivery via rail. On a more positive note, the officers said they thought renewed rioting over fuel shortages was unlikely in the five provinces under their responsibility.

Iran a Player?

17. (SBU) During a December 28 meeting attended by Kuwait econoff in Baghdad between CPA, TF-RIO and the Ministry of Oil, ministry officials charged with fuel distribution mentioned they are nearing completion of an agreement to bring an initial shipment of fifty trucks of kerosene from Iran, and are exploring options to import Iranian LPG. The officials said the "Iraqi transportation union" is negotiating with the Iranians to allow Iraqi trucks to travel to Iran to transport fuel.

18. (U) TF-RIO personnel are actively engaged in meeting the challenges described above. During a late December visit to their offices in Baghdad, TF-RIO officers, in conjunction with CJTF-7 officers and CPA-Oil personnel, told us they have been focusing on improving fuel import performance from Turkey, Jordan and Kuwait. They noted that Kuwaiti imports for the last week of December verses the first week of December increased from 59% to 88% of the weekly benzene goal and from 71% to 98% of the weekly kerosene goal, and that performance has improved by 30% overall for the month. They have also focused on electric power grid and generator problems at Latifyiah and the Rusafa fuel distribution depot (near Baghdad). Recently, grid power has been restored to the Rusafa Depot, two inoperative generators have been turned into one operational generator and TF RIO has arranged for the 249th EN BN to conduct a detailed technical inspection and assessment of all generators at the Latifiya and Rusafa Depots. To improve the efficiency of convoy escorts, they are working to provide close coordination among US Army units, TF RIO, CJTF7, KBR, Al Tammia, CPA-Oil, and the Iraqi Ministry of Oil.

Comment

19. (SBU) Significant amounts of fuel are being delivered from Kuwait for civilian use into southern Iraq, under difficult circumstances, into an aging system that was designed around pipelines instead of truck convoys. Nevertheless, our interlocutors said more fuel could be delivered more efficiently. Among the people we spoke with there is a consensus that the biggest bottleneck restricting the humanitarian fuel program is insufficient downloading capacity. There was also consensus, particularly among military units and truck drivers, that there are insufficient security escorts assigned to this high priority operation. This is exacerbated by "seams" between units, both within the US Army and among multinational forces. According to our

contacts, the hardest piece in getting additional humanitarian fuel supplies into Iraq is increased communications and coordination among the many players on the scene.

120. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
URBANCIC